DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 154 299 CG 012 569

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TITLE Egocentrism and Adjustment.
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 16p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adjustment (to Environment); Behavior; *Egocentrism; Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; Group Status; Locus of Control; Personal Adjustment; Research Projects; *School Attitudes; *Self Concept; *Social Adjustment; *Sociometric Techniques

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to investigate relationships between egocentrism and personal and social adjustment for students in grades four through six. Almost 200 students participated in the study. The results showed that: (1) Less egocentric children tended to be better adjusted. (2) Overall, personal adjustment was moderately related to sociometric scores. (3) Personal adjustment scores were moderately related to sociometric scores at the sixth grade level. (4) For the entire sample, the correlations for egocentrism with self-concept, locus of control, and attitude toward school were low. (Author)

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Egocentrism and Adjustment

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Running head: Egocentrism and Adjustment

CG 012569

Printed in U.S.A.

Egocentrism and Adjustment

In much of his published work, Jean Piaget (1969, 1972a) indicated that social and cognitive development are inseparable characteristics in the analysis of intellectual development. Piaget found that initially children are only able to consider their own perspective. They have not had sufficient experience with the external world to coordinate several viewpoints within a particular situation. Piaget defines egocentrism as thought based on only one's own perspectives.

According to Piaget's (1958) analysis of cognitive development, egocentric characteristics of thought are a natural part of the developmental aspect of logico-mathematical thought. Egocentrism is defined in several ways, with all definitions alluding to the absence of transitive, reversible, and associative combinativity in thought. A young child initially fails to group relations for other individuals and objects; there is only one's own perspective. As thought is socialized, the child's relationship with the environment is enriched. That is, the child participates at more and more complex levels of exchange of thought and cooperation, while concomitantly exchange of thought and cooperation are essential to the child's development of logico-mathematical structures (Piaget, 1958, 1960).

Rubin (1972, 1973) studied egocentrism and popularity in students attending grades K through six. He found that egocentrism and popularity

were related in children attending grades K and two. Karmos and Milcic (1978) found that a stronger relationship between egocentrism and popularity existed for grade five students in comparison to students in grades one through four. Rubin and Schneider (1973) found a moderate relationship between egocentrism and altruistic behavior in seven year olds. Williams (1973) studied egocentrism and social development with third grade "normal" and "gifted" students. Williams concluded that his analysis supported the contention that socialization would increase with concept development. Chandler's (1977) study of 45 delinquent youths found a developmental lag in role taking skills for the delinquent boys. Tierney and Rubin (1975) found no clear evidence to support any relationship between egocentrism and social conformity in first grade children. From research with fifth and sixth grade students, Johnson (1975) concluded that the results indicated a relationship between predisposition to cooperate and affective role taking.

The primary purpose of this research was to investigate relationships of egocentrism with personal and social adjustment. Also, relationships were analyzed for egocentrism with self-concept, attitude toward school, locus of control, and popularity.

Method

Subjects

The 196 students who participated in this study were attending grades four, five, and six in a consolidated school district. Students

lived in two all-white, rural communities.

Instruments

Egocentrism test. The test consisted of three biographical questions and 17 items pertaining to egocentric behavior. The egocentric items were based on Piaget's theory of egocentric behavior and taken from his two books, Judgment and Reasoning in the Child (1972) and The Child's Conception of Space (1967). Egocentrism was measured by items on right and left relations, brother relation, and role and visual perspective. The concept of set and subset, which is affected by egocentrism, was also contained in several items. A high score represented greater egocentric behavior. Reliability and validity information for the instrument is thus far favorable. A test-retest study of this egocentrism instrument showed a reliability coefficient of .86 with 175 students in grades one, three and five. Favorable construct validity for the instrument was revealed in a factor analysis of the test items. The factor analysis showed six factors: Three factors on perspective, one factor on set-subset relation, and two factors on set-membership relation. Further, playground behaviors were assessed in fifteen students attending grades one, three and four. Playground behaviors were significantly related to scores from the egocentrism test.

Adjustment. The California Test of Personality for grades four through six was administered to the sample. Subtests included personal and social adjustment. Personal adjustment subscales were self-reliance, sense of personal worth, sense of personal freedom, feeling of belonging, withdrawing tendencies, and nervous symptoms. Social adjustment subscales

were social standards, social skills, antisocial tendencies, family relations, school relations, and community relations. A higher score represented better adjustment.

Sociometric test. This test consisted of six items used to measure popularity. Each student was asked to write down the names of two classmates for each of the following situations: Those the student would most like to (1) move to another classroom with, (2) work with, (3) play with. Then two names were written down for classmates whom the student would not like to (4) move to another classroom with, (5) work with, (6) play with. Scores from all situations were combined, and the higher the score the more popular the student was perceived to be by peers.

Self-concept. The self-concept items included questions like the following: Do you feel that you are a failure? Are you happy with yourself? The higher the score, the more positive the respondent's self-concept.

Locus of control. These questions were to measure a student's perception of internal-external control. Some example questions were: Is luck more important than hard work for good grades? When you try to do something, does someone stop you? A high score represented a perception that control was more external than internal to oneself.

Attitude toward school. Some of the items included were: Are most teachers pretty good? Do you like school? A more positive attitude toward school was represented by a higher score.

The egocentrism items, sociometric items, eight self-concept items, five locus of control items, and six attitude toward school items were all put into a booklet. Each student was given a booklet and asked to

answer the questions directly on it.

Results

Although the correlations were low between egocentrism and total personal adjustment and total social adjustment, there was still a trend for less egocentrism to relate to better personal adjustment (Table 1). There were low correlations between egocentrism and social adjustment at grades four and six, but no relationship was found at grade five. The positive correlation at grade four was unexpected. It indicated that higher social adjustment scores were related to higher egocentrism scores.

Insert Table 1 about here

The magnitude of the grade level correlations between adjustment scores and sociometric scores (Table 1) were greater in all but one instance than the correlations between adjustment and egocentrism. Overall, personal adjustment was moderately related to sociometric scores (r = .40).

The strongest relationship of egocentrism with personal and social adjustment occurred at grade six. This was also the case for personal adjustment and sociometric scores.

Correlations were calculated for egocentrism and sociometric scores. The highest correlations again occurred at grade six (Table 2), with greater egocentrism being related to lower popularity.

Insert Table 2 about here

The correlations in Table 3 between egocentrism and the subscales for personal adjustment are generally low. There were slight relationships for personal adjustment with withdrawing tendencies at grade four, self-reliance and sense of personal worth at grade five, and feeling of belonging and nervous symptoms at grade six. For these, lower egocentrism tended to go with better adjustment.

Insert Table 3 about here

For grades four and five, in Table 4, there is very little relationship between egocentrism scores and scores from the subscales for social adjustment. In grade six, higher egocentric scoring children tended to view family relations as undesirable and school relations as unsatisfactory.

Insert Table 4 about here

Table 5 shows low correlations for egocentrism with self-concept, locus of control, and attitude toward school. The highest correlations

were between egocentrism and locus of control at grade five. For these two grades, higher egocentrism was related to lower self-concept and more of a perception of external control. Over the entire sample, egocentrism was only slightly related to self-concept, locus of control, and attitude toward school.

Insert Table 5 about here

From this study, the relationship between egocentrism and overall personal and social adjustment scores was found to be strongest at grade six. The relationship between personal adjustment and popularity was also stronger at grade six in comparison to the other grade levels and to the entire sample. Furthermore, the correlations between egocentrism scores and popularity scores was strongest at grade six. There is a slight indication, then, that as children's socialization continues into the upper elementary school, their adjustment may be tied into their ability to reason from various viewpoints.

An obvious limitation in this study is the use of children's responses to paper-pencil items for assessing personal constructs. Their response to a yes or no item, for example, excludes the dynamics behind making the choice. These dynamics, themselves, may represent a cluster of decision making facts important in behavioral analysis, and which is essentially lost by only considering the response.

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Table 1

Correlation Coefficients of Adjustment Measures

with Egocentrism and Sociometric Scores

for Grades 4, 5, and 6

	Adjustment Measure	n	Egocentrism Scores	Sociometric Scores
Grade 4	Personal	65	- .17	.27 *
	Social	62	.15	- .03
Grade 5	Personal	63	- .17	.36 **
	Social	64	- .08	.33 **
Grade 6	Personal	57	- .25	.58 ***
	Social	60	- .22	.24
TOTAL	Personal	185	- .24 ***	.40 ***
	Social	186	- .09	.18 **

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Table 2

Correlation Coefficients between Egocentrism and Sociometric Scores for Grades 4, 5, and 6

Grade	n	γ
4	69	- .26 *
5	65	- .20
6	62	- .29 *
TOTAL	196	- .24 ***

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Table 3

Correlation Coefficients between Egocentrism Scores and Scores from Subscales for Personal Adjustment

	EGOCENTRISM			
Subscale	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	TOTAL
n	65	63	57	185
Self-reliance	-.01	-.24*	-.16	-.16*
Sense of Personal Worth	-.17	-.15	-.09	-.14
Sense of Personal Freedom	.12	-.23	-.14	-.13
Feeling of Belonging	-.19	-.05	-.30*	-.16*
Withdrawing Tendencies	-.26*	-.05	-.06	-.17*
Nervous Symptoms	-.11	-.11	-.36**	-.26***
TOTAL PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT SCORE	-.17	-.17	-.25	-.24***

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Table 4

Correlation Coefficients between Egocentrism Scores

and Scores from Subscales for Personal Adjustment

	EGOCENTRISM			
Subscale	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	TOTAL
n	62	64	60	186
Social Standards	.10	-.04	.12	.06
Social Skills	.14	-.11	-.20	-.08
Anti-social Tendencies	.18	-.06	-.17	-.04
Family Relations	.13	-.02	-.33**	-.15*
School Relations	.03	.02	-.29*	-.09
Community Relations	.02	-.13	.06(61)	-.05(187)
TOTAL SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT SCORE	.15	-.08	-.22	-.09

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Table 5

Correlation Coefficients between Egocentrism Scores and Self-concept, Locus of Control, and Attitude toward School Measures for Grades 4, 5, and 6

	EGOCENTRISM			
	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	TOTAL
n	69	65	62	196
Self-concept	-.29**	-.12	-.14	-.21**
Locus of Control	.18	.24*	.20	.21**
Attitude toward School	-.20	-.00	-.16	-.14*

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$